

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION OF PORTO RICO
Office of the Commissioner
San Juan

Circular Letter No. 115.

May 25, 1916.

To Supervisors of Schools.

Ladies and Gentlemen:--

It appears from last year's annual report that 653 teachers, or 30.4% of the total number in the service, were not returned to the same municipality, that in one municipality with an allotment of 33 teachers, 23 were not returned; in another with an allotment of 29 teachers, 20 were not returned; in another with 80 teachers, 37 were not returned. The principal reason for such changes is said to be due to political considerations. Wherever there was a change of the party in power there were sweeping changes in the teaching corps. Changes in certain municipalities would have been far more marked had teachers not insured their tenure for the current year by financial contributions to local political committees. In 68 of the 74 municipalities in Porto Rico, teachers contribute to the funds of political committees. It has been reported to me that in addition to regular levies there have been in the past cases of direct payments for positions and enforced subscriptions to party newspapers.

From the foregoing facts it is evident that the selection

Circ. letter No. 115 - 2

of teachers in certain municipalities, at least, has been based upon the spoils system and upon political considerations rather than upon professional attainment and meritorious past service. I know that in some municipalities this has not been the case and that school boards have conscientiously elected teachers following the recommendations of supervisors; yet, nevertheless, the evil here referred to has existed in the past.

The public schools of Porto Rico will not be in a position to render their best service until the selection and tenure of teachers shall have been freed from politics. You may be interested in knowing that a Bill to provide for a more stable tenure of teachers was defeated for lack of only three votes in the House of Delegates.

Public opinion on the matter of political contributions by teachers has undergone a considerable change during the past year and I have received assurances from a number of school boards to the effect that this year the selection of teachers will be made solely on a merit basis. This is a very hopeful sign. The time to begin to free the schools from politics is now in the coming selection of teachers and it is our business to undertake the task. In order to protect teachers as far as possible this year in those cases where school boards are inclined to be guided by recommendations of party committees rather than by their own sense of duty and the recommendation of supervisors, I desire you to follow the following instructions:

Circ. letter No. 115 - 8

1. Since in the past certain school boards have lost applications from certain teachers and then gave failure of receipt of application as a reason for non-election, you are instructed to advise your teachers to present their applications by registered mails to the Secretary of the School Board and demand a receipt through the postmaster from the Secretary. This will insure receipt of application by the Board. Registry receipts from secretaries should be handed by teachers to supervisors in order to give the supervisor a check on applications.

2. You will use your good offices with the boards of your district to have all teachers who have served during the past year with a good record, that is, not less than G-, certified to the Commissioner of Education, in accordance with Section 54 of the School Law. It is your duty to insist that teachers with good records be certified for appointment to positions of the same class or higher class in which they have served, provided that they have filed an application. This does not necessarily mean that you should not protect the interest of the teachers with a rating of "F", if there is any special reason for so doing, though I am of the opinion that there are plenty of teachers with a higher classification available. It has been reported to me that last year some teachers failed of re-election because they failed to present applications, giving as a reason that the school board was of a political party opposed to the one with which they

were in sympathy. This Department can not and will not attempt to protect teachers who neglect or willingly refrain from presenting their applications to the school boards under whom they desire to serve.

3. Should any school board persist in disregarding your recommendations and certify other teachers in place of those who served with a good record during the past year, you are directed to bring the facts to my attention, giving details in full. It has been reported to me that in certain towns school boards will take revenge upon teachers who have testified against political committees. In case any board attempts to disregard the good of the service for any such reason as this, you will report the facts promptly when the lists are sent in.

I shall not approve teachers certified by boards to take the place of other teachers now in the service under these conditions, provided that teachers in the service have presented applications in due form to the school board.

4. It has also been reported to me from various sources that in the past certain teachers have offered money to board members or indicated their willingness to political committees to make contributions provided they would be certified for appointment. You will bring any cases of this nature to my attention promptly and certificates of any teachers guilty of the aforesaid practice will be cancelled.

5. You will inform all teachers that they are absolutely

under no obligations to make any money contributions to any party committee and that in case they continue to do so in the future they do so at their own risk and at their own sacrifice. It is absolutely unnecessary to make any contribution or any promise of any contribution to any party committee, school board of individual for the purpose of remaining in their present positions, provided their services have been good and that they have presented an application in due form for certification to the Commissioner of Education. On the other hand, I shall not approve the nomination of any teacher with an unsatisfactory record who makes a contribution to a party committee or has made the promise of such a contribution provided you are in the possession of the facts and bring them to my attention at the time the lists are sent in.

6. You are especially directed to warn teachers against handling or collecting funds for any political committee, whether individually or in behalf of local branches of the Asociación de Maestros. This practice is exceedingly dangerous for those who engage in it and has gotten a few teachers into serious difficulty this year.

Early next week I intend to send out a circular to school boards concerning the nomination of teachers together with a regulation on the subject.

I sincerely believe and trust that school boards will take a righteous attitude when the time comes to nominate teachers for the approval of the Commissioner of Education, and that the good of the service will be the prime consideration.

Yours very truly,

(Signed) P. G. Miller
Commissioner of Education.

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